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Photojournalist documents his own cancer battle in PBS film

By Suzanne Higgins



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Photojournalist John Kaplan

September 27, 2011 · This weekend West Virginia PBS will air the film "Not As I Pictured," a documentary made by Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist John Kaplan about his own battle with lymphoma.

Kaplan was 48 years old, married with 2 children when diagnosed in 2008. He says the possibility of getting cancer never crossed his mind.

"As life can be, as I have learned, what seems like impossible can come along," said Kaplan. "I've been a professor of journalism here at the University of Florida for 13 years and I've really been blessed with near perfect health my entire adult life, no more than a common cold."

"And so when I first heard of what some would say the sinister word cancer, obviously it tore through me like a knife," he said.

"I had very little emotional background to be able to handle it but fortunately I was able to channel my fear and create a film that is truly helping families touched by cancer."

Kaplan calls the decision to make the film *accidental*. He says he started taking pictures of himself, and then video, as a way of coping with the fear of the diagnosis.

"And yet I realized very early on in the process that if I could go into remission, that what I was doing could really be something that could help patients, caregivers and survivors as well." said Kaplan.

He says he believes the film helps people value what they love in life. He says despite it being serious, the documentary is upbeat and life-affirming.

"We're told that it's inspiring and people truly feel better after watching *Not As I Pictured*; they feel empowered."

Love of family and friends is a vital part of treatment, according to Kaplan.

"All I could think of in the middle of this process was I just want to be alive to see my kids grow up and I still feel that way."

Kaplan points to a myriad of cancer support groups available in local communities. He says by turning the camera on himself, he hopes to shine a light on those resources and focus on the significant optimism in the fight against cancer today.

"You know so many cancers today are not only treatable, but beatable, so the theme of my film is that many cancers are falling into the realm of chronic illness, rather than a death sentence."

"So all is not lost, they're making incredible breakthroughs everyday in treatment and research," said Kaplan. "So keep the faith, and I hope that the film will do its part to let the people know you've got a lot of support out there, you can get past this and back to the joy of everyday."

Kaplan has been in remission for almost 3 years.

Ten thousand free copies of the film are being given away at <http://www.notaspictured.org/>.

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By Ben Adducchio

A fish kill at a creek near Morgantown, that happened more than two years ago, is the topic of a new play. "Dead Fish Rising" makes its debut this weekend.

[WVU Symphony ascends Spruce Knob](#)

By Mona Seghatoleslami

At 4863 feet, Spruce Knob is the highest point in West Virginia. This mountain summit lends its name to a symphony by West Virginia University Composer-in-Residence John Beall that will be performed by the WVU Symphony Orchestra.

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By John Hingsbergen

Wheeling Jesuit University will formally inaugurate its ninth president Thursday.

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By John Hingsbergen & Associated Press

The United Mine Workers of America has reached contract agreements with several Patriot Coal Corp. subsidiaries in West Virginia and Kentucky.

[Flu clinics underway in WV](#)

By Ben Adducchio

As the weather starts getting cooler, flu season is about to begin. Flu clinics are getting underway in some areas of the Mountain State.

The DVDs will come with a cancer-coping guide created by the American Society of Clinical Oncology, with input from Kaplan.

Not As I Pictured is airing on PBS stations nationally.

It's scheduled Saturday, Oct 1, at 7pm on West Virginia PBS.2.

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